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SUBJECT: TURKEY: PUBLICLY FUNDED ELECTIONS DELIVER SMOOTH
RESULTS BUT PROBLEMS LOOM

11. (U) Summary: Turkish election experts believe the GOT's public campaign financing system contributed to the trouble-free July 22 election. Supporters contend that providing campaign operating funds to parties that garnered 7 percent in the 2002 election allows candidates to focus on campaigning and governing, rather than fundraising. It also reduces the influence of special interest groups and the wealthy on election results. Detractors argue that the system adds unnecessary government costs, detaches the political parties from the needs of their constituents, and diminishes political competition. While the system served the country well during this parliamentary election, the 7 percent threshold could make it difficult for dissenting voices to be heard in the next. End summary.

Public Election Financing Contributes to Smooth Elections

12. (U) Political parties in Turkey receive much of their revenue from government grants. To receive government funds, parties must have captured at least 7 percent of the popular vote in the preceeding national election. Parties that garner less than 7 percent receive nothing. In 2007, the government paid 100 million YTL to five parties for annual operating expenses, 216.3 million to those parties to fund the July 22nd elections, and an additional 100 million to the Supreme Election Board to implement the elections. Parties procure funds proportional to the percentage of votes won in the preceeding national election. For example, in 2002 AKP received 34 percent of the vote, which assured that in 2007, the party would receive 43 percent of the funds, in this case 47 million YTL for annual operating expenses and an additional 94 million for the national elections.

13. (U) Proponents contend that the system allows parties to focus on campaigning and governing rather than fundraising. Competing in Turkish elections is costly. Political rally organizer Sermurat Kucukgul says technical work to stage rallies in Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir cost roughly 12,000 YTL each. Major political party leaders like Tayyip Erdogan, Abdullah Gul, and Deniz Baykal held multiple rallies daily. The parties also spent a prodigious amount on flags and pennants -- CHP alone amassed over 5.5 million pieces of such paraphernalia -- which cost between 2.5 and 7.5 YTL each. Kucukgul and other experts maintain the system also reduces the influence of special interest groups and curbs the

effects of wealth inequality on election results. They also contend the system does not stifle competition, as evidenced by this election, where five parties representing a diverse array of ideas received government funds.

Detractors Argue Money Talks

¶4. (U) Detractors argue that the extensive government funds lead to a gap between political parties and the needs of their constituents. Parties are less likely to craft representative policies, allowing a top-down management style, commonplace in Turkish politics, to flourish. The system also works to shut out smaller parties, they claim. Omer Faruk Genckaya, an election expert from Bilkent University, contends there now exists "a cartel party system," where leaders from the major political parties collude with each other to keep government funding high, and avoid reforms that would allow funds to be distributed more widely.

¶5. (U) Comment: Turkey's dynamic parliamentary election environment was partly due to a system that provided funds to the five parties that surpassed the 7 percent threshold in the 2002 elections (AKP, CHP, MHP, DYP, GP). That same 7 percent threshold could make it difficult for dissenting voices to be heard the next time, however. Only AKP, CHP, and MHP garnered over 7 percent in the July 22 vote, setting them but not other parties up to receive substantial government funding in the next national election. Smaller parties lacking government-funded campaigns are likely to struggle, if not close down altogether. Ultimately, voters will suffer by having fewer choices. While Turkey is known for holding lively, free and fair elections, the GOT may

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revive proposals to lower the 7 percent threshold to ensure that continues.

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